TIMESCAPES

JAGANNATH PRASAD DAS

TIMESCAPES brings together the recent poems of the poet whose earlier collections *First Person* and *Love is a Season* had been highly acclaimed by readers and critics alike. Reading these poems is like making an intense journey through time itself, where past, present and future are linked together in an extended metaphor.

TIMESCAPES takes over from where the poet's earlier poems had left off. After his first person quests and questionings and his ordeals through seasons of love, the poet finally seems to have come to terms with life, and its many joys and sorrows.

These short, deceptively simple poems, dealing among other things with life, love and time, together form a unity which gives the impression of reading a highly lyrical novel, each chapter being pared down into a single remarkable poem.

Rs 25

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JAGANNATH PRASAD DAS



ARNOLD-HEINEMANN

First Published, 1980

Published by Gulab Vazirani for Arnold–Heinemann Publishers (India) Pvt. Ltd., AB/9 Safdarjang Enclave, New Delhi -- 110029 and printed at Pearl Offset Press, 5/33 Kirti Nagar Industrial Area, New Delhi - 15.

CONTENTS

BEGINNING

In the blind alleys
of life,
chance meetings
are promises.

MASKS

When the heart is laden
with secrets
it can no longer bear,
I break down
under the weight
of my many masks.

I take off the masks
one by one
and bare myself before
the mirror of our relationship
in your face
and see myself
stripped to the soul.

The disbelief on your face
cracks me up like another mask,
and the smouldering surprise
of your eyes
burns down the real me.

WORDS

Words trickle down
like blood
from the wounds
of loneliness ;

there are no
answering voices
to stem the flow.

Words clot
into brief echoes ;
the bleeding stops
in wordless silences.

DEFINITIONS

What come through
the portents
of togetherness and parting
are the moments.

What passes
through the sequence
of growing up
is the cycle of the seasons.

What wanes through life
is the inevitability
of memory.

Time is what passes by
in the absence of love.

FEAR

Lest the magic
of silence crack,
we kept quiet.

We kept our meetings brief,
anticipating parting.

We averted our eyes
lest doubt creep into them,
when we look at each other.

We dared not communicate,
lest the relationship oppress.

In our fear of time
and of the cycle of the seasons,
we emptied out our lives
in a single
one–blossom spring.

NIGHTFALL

The sun will set
behind you
in a lonely universe
and the sad heavens,

leaving in your eyes
the deadly darkness
of twin stars.

The darkness is you.

Afraid, I will come back
to my own loneliness.

The loneliness is you.

MORNING

When the night
shrouds me
with its dark mysteries,
I stretch my arms
towards morning.

At the end of the night,
when the stars die out,
I watch your
eyes slowly open.

And then I get lost
in the private dark
of those twin stars,
never to see
the morning again.

IDENTITY

When either of us
cannot be defined
except in terms
of the other,
I can have
no identity
except in your context.

Within the confines
of time,
I am the heir
of your past,
asking for
the inheritance
of our future.

Let there be
no other identity
except
our relationship.

WAITING

When you drift across
my dreams
to another dream,
I will come back
to my lonely experience,
where there is only
eternal waiting.

When you flit across
from my experience
to another experience,
I will come back
to the immortality
of my dreams, where
there is no waiting.

PLEDGE

I will pledge to you
my dreams
of a yesterday,
which your doubts,
will leave unredeemed
till another time.

When you accept them
some tomorrow,
todays will have
become yesterdays.

There can be pledges
only outside time,
where there will be
no one but us,
claiming the memories
of the present.

PRESENT

All my waiting
was for the past.

All my memories
were of the future.

All that is
without memory,
without waiting,
is my present.

TIME

There is no third side
to time.

Life is the curse of death
for holding on to birth.

Memory is punishment
for not overtaking
what was.

When the past comes
stalking the present,
collecting evidence
against the future,
time has no regrets.

MIRROR

I will look
at the mirror
till you come
and stand beside me.

When our eyes meet,
a wan smile
will cross your lips,
and our reflections
will return
to a memoryless dark,
leaving me all alone.

I shall then
wipe off my tears,
and keep waiting
for the return
of the image.

BETRAYAL

We deserved all these :
moments that were priceless,
happiness out of this world,
this magnificent communion.

We denied ourselves
the happiness
we had in our hands,
in a mutual misunderstanding.

What we could have
given to each other,
we gave away to time
in a supreme betrayal.

TRYST

When I look at the mirror
this morning,
you would have vanished
into the dark
of yesternight.

The days would fly off
the calendar pages
to the seasons
past the open windows.

Towards the frontiers of
blurred reflections
where I had a tryst with you
beyond time.

FLIGHT

In my flight
to the future,

if you trap me
in the memories
of our past,
from which
there is no escape,

who shall I pledge
my present to ?

TRUTH

No other knowledge
is expedient here
except your casual passion,
which is a supreme truth.

No other precept
is relevant here,
except your active indifference,
which is
another supreme truth.

BLIND STREET

On my way to you
down lonely roads
I will come back
again and again
to where I started,
taking wrong turns
in blind streets.

When at one such turn
you touch my arm
to warn me,

I will turn round
and walk into
another blind street.

POEMS

I recite my poems
to a friendless land
where you have banished me,
where the desert of words
searches in vain
for the
welcome rains of understanding.

Shut behind the bars
of rhyming lines,
in my prison of metaphors
and imagery,
when I open the doors
of meaning.

I know I can walk out
only towards the obscurity
that is you.

REALISATION

In the kingdom
of echoes and shadows,
it is difficult
to find truth.

In vain we search
for the universe
in the discrete fragments
of time.

Reality is untenable
on the edges
of distorting mirrors.

Only when one
wakes into life,
into timelessness,
on the precipice of death
one can realise oneself.

EYES

Tomorrow never comes
in a nightmare,
but the eyes see all :
that which is,
and that which is not.

When you close your eyes
and disappear
in an alien land beyond,

I stand at the edge of nothing,
and see myself disappear
in the relentless dark
of your eyes,
in a feeble attempt
to redeem my
fragmented dreams.

MEETING

When we meet each other
in the intensity of our parting,
we can claim death
as our own.

If you call me a stranger
when I look at you again,

remember,
we are destined
to fall in love again
for a lifetime that is our own.

MEMORIES

Whatever I see
is through the prism of memories,
which makes the commonplace
blaze in many colours.

Whatever I think
has no identity of its own;
they are all tangled in the past
tremulous in my consciousness.

When I see myself
in the depth of your eyes,
it is only the experienced me
and my transfigured soul.

When a strange shadow
spreads across your face,
carving it into stone,
I find myself all alone.

In that primal touch of immortality,
I reject all memories.

CREDENTIALS

Some day,
my vagrant past will confront me,
questioning my identity.
But I will have no name,
no country except loneliness,
no religion except
the nexus of my desires,
no possessions except
a few mementoes of pain
and wild memories.

When I reach the grey walls
of the blind alley,
I will look back at my past
from where all the roads
go back to where we met.

UNDERSTANDING

Only you can be
your own interpretation,
through the tentative touch
of your hands
and the warmth of your breath.

Only you can be love's
cold sermons
and many violent morals.

Why should I then
try to fathom,
in the return
of the echoes,
those few casual words
of yours
with which I was betrayed ?

REFLECTIONS

When reflections return
steeped in pretensions,
questioning my love,

I shall will the disloyal
mirror to crack ,
for there is no communion
in its transparent ache.

Each fragment
of the broken mirror
will wreak its vengeance,

echoing the merciless call
of different deaths
for each day of my life.

AFFINITIES

I have strange affinities
with strangers.

Along the sidewalks,
my eyes search out
other eyes,
which have no smile
of recognition in them.

I understand words
which remain unsaid
on unknown lips.

How can you then
walk the street,
crossing my eyes,
sullen and silent,
beyond unrecognition ?

DAYS

The letters
you wrote to me
were all cautious and guarded.

The sad smile
of their words
kept away the spring,
like winter mist.

My days splintered into
fragments of small moments
and were scattered away

like bits of paper
into the season
of your absences.

WINDOW

When we took our pledge
to remember each other
for ever and ever,
we forgot time.

I averted my eyes
from the window.

Now, at the time
of our parting,
when we seek
to figure out time,
I look out
of the window and see
only the distance.

DAYBREAK

There are no reflections
in the mirror of the night.
The breath of silence
oppresses the air.
The room is stilled
with the passion
of echoes.

When the morning sunshine
washes away
the frail remembrances,
everything strays

except the mirror of
your face,
which reflects the memory
of an unfinished night.

DESPAIR

Your every word
was a thunder
I was not prepared for.

You covered my escapes
and trapped my uneasy conscience
with the night's passions,
with the day's lusts.

When your absence gathers up
the surplus moments,
leaving multiple silences
in the recesses of time,

I will withstand despair,
remembering your last whisper.

LETTERS

When your letters
call me
amidst their laughter
in a brief dream,

I would not like
to find betrayal
in the equivocal words
strewn across the pages.

My first look
reflected on
the frail paper
will set them afire,

before my eager eyes
seek to smoulder in them.

EXILE

You took me by my hand
and led me across roads
paved with your love
that I had dreamt of.

We arrived at a season
made of your elements,
which answered all my desires.

But when parting comes,
in the days of our dissensions,
where will you exile me ?

Where is the land
which is not the
guide book of your personality ?
Where is the time
which is not the journal
of your private self ?

SELF

How can you get lost
before I seek you ?
You will have to
come back to me
in this ruthless sequence
of nearness and parting.

Your classic deterrents
will stay my hands,
but what is innocence
unless one has learnt sin ?

How can you go away
crumbling the walls
of my memory ?
All roads will end
at the portals
of your eyes, and
you shall not be the same again
once I have known you.

For the only truth
is my own self
and your inevitability.

SEASONS

Days approach late
and leave early
but you stay on
in the present,

and I am yours
through the spring blossoms.

When time is held
in suspended space,
winter alone
is the parting of our ways,

and my practised patience.

NIGHT

Let's step outside
where the night waits
to claim us.

Beyond the cul–de–sac,
different cries will
call us.
The wind will whisper
of unknown dangers,
and will–o–the–wisp point
towards the valley of death.

Before the roads fade,
let's give ourselves away
to the night
and step into the darkness.

Where, in an all–conscious moment,
we'll discover the map of love,
we'll recognise strangers
by their phantom voices,
and understand each other
through the tender touch
of light.

DARKNESS

There are no shadows
of the morning,
you own them all.
Darkness is the
depth of your shadow.

Your identity
is the transition
from the faith
of daybreak
to the conviction
of dusk,
you are a country
which can be traversed
in safety
only at night.

In the dark
continents of time,
you are a pain
that darkens itself
into grief
in a single transition.

HURRICANES

Go away,
the wild wastes
in your eyes keep crying.

When I look into them,
there are no waves
of swirling clouds ;
no explosion of forest greens ;
there is only a hurricane.

Hurricanes do not
bring rains ;
hurricanes carry only
wild wastes which cry,
go away !

PROMISE

When you fail to keep
your promise to come,

the rivers running to
their estuaries
will dry up before
reaching the sea.

The sky will open
into the expanse
of the wild wastes.

The wind will stumble
against its own echoes.

Till you come back.
Till you come back
to keep your promise.

POETS

In the arc of sunlight,
they seek inspiration
from the casual whirlwind,
though it whispers
only meaningless words.

Admonitions of time
blow away the dry leaves.
The skies look down
in a silent gesture.

The wind touches off
a spark of sunshine
on the point of the pen,
fixed in a serene moment.

Poets walk over
to the shadows
and sow more loneliness,
keeping time with the wind

LIGHT

The feeble light
of my eyes
will search for you
in the room,
where you'll be seated
all alone
holding on to all
the darkness,
ignoring the last rays
of the dying light.

The light of my eyes
will enter you,
ignoring your unique dark
before it finally dies.

TOGETHERNESS

In uncertain moments,
sitting across the table
you withdraw yourself
into your own private world.
What else is separation ?

Your thoughts,
crossing the seven seas
nudge my sullen moments,
evoking your memories.
What else is togetherness ?

PARTING

In our moments
of nearness
the fleeting days
will leave us behind
before we can
catch up with them.

When we part,
our promises to each other
will look back at us
with a certain pity,
before we can
open our lips
in feeble protest.

LOSS

What separated us
was your body,
which vanquished the sun
in its familiar equinox.

My defeat was written
in my unbridled eyes,
which surrendered
the demands of the future
in a summer's travail.

The announcements of time
on the borderline of tomorrow,
made me lose my private goddess
in one complete
life–long day.

DESIRES

Roads get lost
in the ruins of the sky.

The sky spreads across
the waves of secrets.

The evening wanes
in the last refrains
of the nightmare.

In the still mirror
of the sea,
desires fade out
in their own evaluation.

RETURN

You brought no flowers,
except the laughter
on your lips.

When the morning shadows
paid their homage to you,
and the welcoming faces
turned away from the sun
to look at you,
I hid behind
my own darkness
beyond starlight.

I will come back to you
some day
with the experience of death,
and anchor myself
to the precipice of your eyes.

When you open your eyes,
I'll pledge myself to you
in the brightness of your laughter,
plucking the sun
from the caverns of death.

EMOTIONS

Awaiting your return,
emotions burst out
to welcome you.

After the futile waiting,
when the day wanders away
to the frontiers of memory,

emotions skim to the lips,
and before confronting
the vowels and consonants,
turn into sighs.

SEQUENCE

The morning calls up the noon,
which blots out
the memory - laden words
from the depth of passion,
undressing dreams
in an accepted truth.

The noon calls up the evening,
where thoughts cease,
leaving only a grey sky
of limitless love
and an eternal dusk.

The evening calls up the night,
where isolated agonies
stretch empty moments to eternity,
turning love into
time made articulate.

OMENS

The compulsions of your smile
tire off the city
in grey loneliness.

In the chorus of your words,
shadows climb down the trees
and silence the murmur
of the leaves.

The cold touch of your hand
spirits away
the intimacy of dew drops
from the grass.

Your unseeing glance
burns down the dreams
of the horizon.

Your hesitation to be
yourself to me,
spreads some more wilderness
in my dark despairs
reflected in the skies.

END

We left laughter behind
somewhere on the way.

The meteor changed its course ;
eyes stayed fixed on the mid–ocean.

The forest receded ;
the lone tree stretched
its hands towards the sky.

Islands remained unknown ;
the wind blew away the dreams.

The battleground is quiet now ;
there are no tears.



Jagannath Prasad Das is a leading poet and playwright whose works have been translated into several languages. His publications include *Pratham Purush* (1971), *Anya Sabu Mrityu* (1975), *Je Jahara Nirjanata* (1978) all collections of poems in Oriya, and plays: *Suryaast* (1973), *Sabse Neecheka Admi* (1976), and *Asangat Natak* (1980). *First Person*, *Love is a Season*, and *Before Sunset* are his works published by Arnold-Heinemann.

His plays have been translated into several Indian languages and have been staged in different parts of the country, besides being adapted for radio and television.

Recipient of the prestigious Homi Bhabha Fellowship, he is currently engaged in a study of Paintings of Orissa.

Born in Orissa in 1936, he lives and works in New Delhi.

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